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BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF THE LOWER NAUGATUCK VALLEY, Inc. JOINS A NATIONWIDE CALL TO ACTION CONCERNING CRISES AFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Harris Survey, Leading Experts and Prominent Club Alumni Address Crime and Violence, Dropout Epidemic, Youth Obesity

Major New York Event Launches "Impact 2012"

(Shelton), October 19, 2007— America's young people need our help, concluded a panel of child development experts that came together in New York City today to examine issues impacting youth. Too many children and teens are not receiving the guidance they need to graduate from high school, to avoid the effects of violence, gangs and drugs, or to become responsible adults.

The panel, brought together by Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA), issued a call to action asking Americans to become outraged over what is happening to young people, to make a commitment to help reverse the negative trends affecting kids in communities throughout the nation, and to join Clubs nationwide, including the Boys & Girls Clubs of The Lower Naugatuck Valley, in their mission of changing and saving young lives. The organization's national spokesperson and alumnus Denzel Washington, along with actor and alumnus Cuba Gooding Jr. and WNBA all-star and alumna Swin Cash, joined the panel to discuss the positive and profound impact the Boys & Girls Clubs have had on their lives.

"As a nation, we need to provide more safe havens for children and teens in our communities," said Jack Ribas, Executive Director, of the Boys & Girls Club. "Today we join with all the Clubs nationwide in calling on civic leaders, educators, parents and other caring adults to 'share the outrage' concerning the dropout epidemic, the increasing levels of violence, and other growing threats to the well-being of our young people. Boys & Girls Clubs will do their part, with the support of many caring and concerned citizens, but we cannot turn the tide alone."

The panel also discussed the results of a new Harris Interactive survey of Club alumni that confirmed the positive impact Boys & Girls Clubs have on kids who pass through their doors. The group concluded by asking Americans everywhere to help build more safety nets for the nation's youth by supporting Boys & Girls Clubs and other community-based organizations that serve children.

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Panelists included Harvard University's Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint, one of the nation's preeminent child psychiatrists; Northeastern University's Dr. James Alan Fox, national youth violence expert, professor of criminal justice and author; Harris Interactive Chairman/CEO Humphrey Taylor; BGCA Chairman Rick Goings and President/CEO Roxanne Spillett; and Stacey Walker, 19, Boys & Girls Clubs of America's 2006-07 National Youth of the Year, from Des Moines, Iowa.

According to the Harris survey, 57 percent of alumni believe the Club saved their life. Verbatim comments reveal that alumni found a safe haven at the Club, away from disruptive or dysfunctional family situations or other negative influences in their neighborhoods.

"The Club was my whole world from the time I was six years old. It's where I learned how to focus and set my mind on a goal; it's where I learned about consequences and how to be a man," recalled Denzel Washington. "I believe we all have the responsibility to give something back; to leave the world a better place for our having been here. For me, that means giving back to Boys & Girls Clubs of America, whose programs helped shape me and gave my life purpose and direction. I can't think of a nobler or more fulfilling mission than to guide our young children and set them down the right path."

Four Major Areas of Concern

The panel focused its discussion on four major areas of concern impacting America's youth today: crime and violence, high school dropout rates, obesity and health, and crises affecting African-American males. Based on the survey results, a significant number of Boys & Girls Club alumni agree that they would not have graduated from high school, attended college, or stayed out of trouble if not for the Club.

- **Crime & Substance Abuse:** **Crime, drug and alcohol use** are among the most serious problems affecting America's young people. Every 24 hours, more than 15,000 teens use drugs for the first time. Every two hours a youth is murdered. Every four minutes a youth is arrested for an alcohol-related crime and every seven minutes a youth is arrested for a drug crime, and in the next 24 hours, 3,506 teens will run away from home. Some **67 percent** of Club alumni attribute their ability to avoid difficulty with the law to the influence of Club staff, and **67 percent** also say the Club is where they learned how to "say no" to drugs and alcohol.

- **Dropout Rates:** In 2006 alone, 1.2 million teenagers **did not graduate from high school** in the United States -- that's 30 percent of the class of 2006. The number increases to an astonishing 50 percent among some minorities. According to a survey by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 88 percent of those surveyed (ages 16 to 25 in 25 urban, rural and suburban communities nationwide) had passing grades when they dropped out of school, and 91 percent of those dropouts said they knew that graduating was vital to their future success. According to the Harris Alumni Survey, some **28 percent** report they would have dropped out of high school if not for the Club, plus another **51 percent** achieved a higher level of education than they thought possible because of attending the club.

- **Childhood Obesity: Obesity and lack of physical fitness** is also a serious issue affecting today's youth. According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 16 percent of adolescents in the United States are overweight. This figure has nearly tripled in the last 20 years. Some 25 percent of young people (ages 12-21) report that they do not participate in any vigorous physical activity and 14 percent report that they don't even participate in any light to moderate physical activity. This lack of physical fitness and abundance of obesity means that 16 percent of our teens are at risk for heart disease, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Type 2 diabetes has also increased dramatically in teens as a direct result of adolescent obesity. Of the alumni surveyed, **80 percent** said that their Club experience made a positive impact on their attitude toward fitness and health, with **74 percent** participating in organized sports.

Impact 2012: Building for the Future

Boys & Girls Clubs of America used the panel discussion as the official kick-off for Impact 2012, a five-year strategic plan formulated by representatives of Clubs throughout the country, including the Clubs in the Lower Naugatuck Valley. For the period between 2008 and 2012, BGCA has identified several strategic priorities, the most important being the deepening of impact on young lives through:

- Increased overall daily attendance, and increased frequency of attendance for each Club member;
- Emphasis on outcome measurement of success indicators, including academic achievement, juvenile crime reduction, and level of civic engagement;
- Outreach to more young people and families most in need;
- Special emphasis on serving the needs of teens;
- Strengthening of local Clubs through enhanced training and development of professional staff;
- Establishment of new Clubs in communities where the needs are greatest, reaching a total of 5,000 local service locations by 2012.

"As an organization that has provided hope and opportunity for the youth of **the Valley** since **1956**, we are proud to add our voice to this nationwide call to action on behalf of America's kids," said **Jack Ribas**. "We hope all local community leaders, citizens and parents will continue to join us in putting the needs of our children and teens at the forefront of our priorities."